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FM AMEMBASSY CARACAS
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 0085
INFO EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE
WESTERN HEMISPHERIC AFFAIRS DIPL POSTS
RHEHNSC/WHITE HOUSE NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC
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C O N F I D E N T I A L CARACAS 001517

SIPDIS

HQ SOUTHCOM ALSO FOR POLAD

AMEMBASSY BERLIN PASS TO AMCONSUL DUSSELDORF

AMEMBASSY BERLIN PASS TO AMCONSUL LEIPZIG

AMEMBASSY ATHENS PASS TO AMCONSUL THESSALONIKI

AMEMBASSY BRIDGETOWN PASS TO AMEMBASSY GRENADA

AMEMBASSY OTTAWA PASS TO AMCONSUL QUEBEC

AMEMBASSY BRASILIA PASS TO AMCONSUL RECIFE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 2034/12/02

TAGS: PREL PGOV PREF CO VE

SUBJECT: Ambassadors Discuss Expulsion of Colombian Miners/Colombian Venezuelan Bilateral Relations

CLASSIFIED BY: DUDDY, AMBASSADOR, DOS, AMB; REASON: 1.4(B), (D)

¶1. (C) Summary: On December 1, Ambassador met with Colombian Ambassador to Venezuela Maria Luisa Chiappe at the residence of Mexican Embassy Political Counselor Maria Elena Alcaraz, at the former's request. Ambassador Chiappe confirmed reports that late last week approximately 500 miners - mostly Colombian but also including some Brazilians - who were operating illegally at a mine in Venezuela's Amazonas state near the border with Colombia were expelled by Venezuelan security forces into Colombia. She also said that there were reports that approximately 1,000 miners working in the same location had managed to evade the security forces and were likely hiding out nearby, but required assistance from an international body such as the Red Cross to ensure their health and welfare. Regarding Colombian-Venezuelan bilateral relations, Ambassador Chiappe expressed concern over the deleterious impact that the current crisis has had on the previously robust trading relationship. She also noted the deterioration of the security situation along the border, alluding to the unfettered access of many armed groups to the Venezuelan side of the border. End Summary.

¶2. (C) As a result of not wanting to be seen entering the U.S. Embassy, Ambassador Chiappe directed her request for a meeting with Ambassador Duddy through mutual acquaintance Maria Elena

Alcaraz of the Mexican Embassy, who hosted the informal conversation at her residence. Ambassador Chiappe began by confirming reports that late the previous week, Venezuelan armed forces helicopters descended on a mine near the border with Colombia in the western part of Venezuela's Amazonas state. (Note: while she did not specifically cite the date or location, other information available to post indicates these events took place at the Yacapana mine near San Fernando de Atabapo on September 26. End Note.) Of the 1,500 miners reportedly working there, the security forces expelled into Colombia approximately 500 miners who did not possess legal status to either live or work in Venezuela. Ambassador Chiappe affirmed that most of the miners were Colombian, although some were Brazilian. The other 1,000 miners managed to escape the security dragnet and flee into the surrounding countryside, where most likely remained.

¶3. (C) Ambassador Chiappe expressed the view that Venezuela had the right to deport foreigners who were living and working illegally in the country, but also noted that the GOC expected the GBRV to "respect the human rights" of any individuals subject to forced repatriation. She highlighted the GOC's preoccupation with the well-being of the miners who were hiding out, stating that an International Red Cross team had tried to enter the area to check on them, but were apparently denied access to the area. In the current bilateral political environment, Ambassador Chiappe observed, the GOC feared that the GBRV might attempt to accuse the miners of being "paramilitaries," or of having some other nefarious intent.

¶4. (C) Regarding Colombian-Venezuelan bilateral relations in light of the ongoing dispute, Ambassador Chiappe identified trade and insecurity along the border as the GOC's primary worries. She confirmed widely circulated data that a precipitous drop in cross-border trade had transpired in a short period of time, and that this drop was particularly harmful to the Colombian communities living near the border with Venezuela, who depended on such trade for their livelihood. She also asserted that the Venezuelan side of the border area had become a haven for armed groups of all kinds, including but not limited to the FARC and ELN.
DUDDY